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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2017

TAGS: PARM MARR PREL RS EUN LG

SUBJECT: LATVIA ISSUES STRONG STATEMENT ON MISSILE DEFENSE,  
COUNTERS RUSSIAN CLAIMS

REF: STATE 21640

Classified By: Ambassador Catherine Todd Bailey. Reason: 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Pol/econ chief delivered reftel points on missile defense to Latvian Political Director Ilgavrs Klava February 23. As Latvian FM Pabriks had just received a call from his Lithuanian counterpart on this issue, Klava was grateful for our points. He said Latvia would look to issue a statement on this issue, which it did on February 26 (text in para 4 below). Subsequently, pol/econ chief encouraged Klava to have Latvia pursue a coordinated EU statement on this issue. Klava was skeptical this would be possible and did not think Latvia should take the lead on this, but said they would support others who made such an approach. MFA director of security policy Kapars Ozoloins told pol/econ chief February 26 that Latvia would draw on the statement for upcoming MD discussions at NATO, including in the NATO-Russia Council.

¶2. (C) On the evening of February 26, Ambassador Bailey thanked FM Pabriks for Latvia's strong statement on this issue and encouraged him to use it in discussions at the EU and NATO on the issue. Pabriks agreed that Latvia would draw from this statement in various international discussions.

¶3. (C) Comment: The Latvians were surprisingly forward leaning in this statement, especially given their delicate negotiations with Russia over the border treaty. While they recognize that an EU statement would provide them some additional cover with Moscow, they appear unwilling to take the lead on this. Our assessment is that this stems mainly from an unwillingness to take on the bigger EU states who oppose our MD efforts. End comment.

¶4. (U) Begin text of Latvian MFA statement:

In response to the recent information published in media outlets regarding the development of a global anti-ballistic missile defense system and the possible deployment of the elements of the system in Poland and the Czech Republic, the Latvian Foreign Minister, Artis Pabriks, stressed the importance of the development of a U.S. proposed global missile defense system in view of the current global threats caused by the uncontrolled spread of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic (missile) technology. Mr. Pabriks also noted that the system will contribute to the safety of the people of Latvia,

The U.S. developed anti-ballistic missile defense system is primarily directed the potential threats from the countries of the Persian Gulf region which develop nuclear programs and missile technology in an uncontrolled way. The United Nations and the European Union are currently working on a package of sanctions to impose on Iran for that country's refusal to halt its uranium enrichment program and to allow international monitoring of (its nuclear) program.

The development of the anti-ballistic missile defense system is not directed against Russia. For a number of years the U.S. has been regularly informing Russia about its policy in the area of anti-ballistic missile defense and about the plans and programs pertaining to the system to be created. Neither in its technical aspects, nor from its geographic locality is the U.S. anti-ballistic missile defense system being created as a counter to the Russian nuclear potential. Therefore, Latvia considers that the eventual deployment of separate elements of the system - radar and interceptor missiles - in the Czech Republic and Poland respectively could not threaten Russia in any way.

Statements by individual Russian officials about the threats to Russia caused by the Global anti-ballistic missile defense system and the eventual targeting of Russian missiles against Poland and the Czech Republic should be regarded as obsolete thinking more appropriate to past Cold War times and which is not appropriate for the 21st century.

Currently, a directly opposite understanding is required - the international community must cooperate to prevent an uncontrolled spread of weapons of mass destruction and to upgrade the technical means of defense, including an anti-ballistic missile defense system, that could most effectively prevent these eventual threats.

BAILEY